

Pacific Women Building Peace: A Regional Perspective

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This article offers an alternative perspective on Pacific Islands regionalism that emphasizes “bottom-up,” informal avenues of regional cooperation. This contrasts with the more typical analysis of Pacific Islands regional integration, which is focused on the history and function of regional multilateral institutions. Commonly, such approaches open the way for discussion about how regional institutions promote Pacific states’ cooperation on economic, trade, or security matters, or enhance the agency of Pacific states as they defend particular political objectives on the international stage. When conflicts in the region have erupted and given greater weight to the idea of a “Pacific in crisis,” regional integration has increasingly also been mooted as a strategy that can promote collective security in the Pacific and diminish the spread and impact of instability (McGhie 2005; Urwin 2005). Yet such an emphasis on the institutionalized aspects of Pacific regionalism, and the extent to which it offers a progressive solution to some of the challenges facing the Pacific, has meant that other informal avenues of Pacific regional integration have not received the same attention.

This scenario occurs despite the long, if commonly ignored, history of regional networks forged among Pacific Islanders at the community level. These networks may have developed through Islanders’ religious affiliation and their participation in regional religious congresses such as the Pacific Council of Churches; through their involvement with regional education and training organizations such as the University of the South Pacific, the Community Education and Training Centre (CETC) of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC),¹ and the many theological training institutes throughout the region; or through their participation in regional advocacy networks that have mobilized around specific causes such as Island

communities' political independence, the promotion of women's rights and labor rights, or environmental protection (Slatter and Underhill-Sem 2009, 196).

Although widespread acknowledgment has been accorded to the late Epeli Hau'ofa's thesis regarding the Oceanic imaginary (1998, 1994), this seems not to have sparked a strong scholarly interest in understanding how informal pathways of regional engagement operate in the contemporary Pacific. Hau'ofa's positive vision of a regional Pacific community counters the idea that Pacific Islanders are collectively isolated and made vulnerable by their dispersed terrestrial geography. Instead, Hau'ofa vaunted the strength and dynamism of a Pacific regional community linked informally yet strongly by an aquatic proximity. Such views have proved valuable for advocates of Pacific regionalism in both academic and policy-making circles. They provide evidence of an underlying, homegrown logic to programs that aim to promote regional institutional integration in the arenas of Pacific Islands governance and economic development. They are also important ammunition when defending against the claims of regional skeptics who argue that such projects increasingly reflect the hegemonic ambitions of foreign powers neighboring—and seeking to manage—the region rather than Pacific Island communities themselves (Crocombe 1992, 181–185). And, when even stickier questions are raised about the legitimacy of attempts to identify an inclusive and representative regional political community, they also provide important background considerations (Fry 2004, 4–5).

While Hau'ofa's thesis is often referenced in these ongoing debates, it must also be investigated in ways that focus less on the institutional implications of his arguments. Indeed, despite the fact that a great deal of Hau'ofa's thinking on the subject of regionalism emphasized Pacific Islanders' capacity to maintain bottom-up and informal modes of regional identification and connection and a concern with “what ordinary people are actually doing” (Hau'ofa 1994:156), little in-depth research has been conducted into the political content and influence of this type of activity, aside from broadly noting that it exists (Crocombe 2001, 593, 594, 608–609; Slatter and Underhill-Sem 2009, 195; Fry 2004, 5). The research presented in this article on the history of Pacific women's informal collaborations around peacebuilding therefore aims to provide a counter narrative to the more dominant trend in research on Pacific regionalism, while also recognizing that there is scope for a great deal more research to be conducted in this area.²

The ensuing discussion proceeds in four parts. The first section examines the predominant trends in contemporary debate on Pacific Islands regionalism and the importance of acknowledging informal sites of regional integration. It opens with a discussion of mainstream scholarship that draws links between regional integration in the Pacific and the promotion of regional security. This leads into a longer discussion of the hitherto ignored aspects of Pacific women's regional networking and advocacy collaborations around peacebuilding from the 1960s until the present day. The second and third sections of this paper examine the changing nature of this activity. Section two illustrates the differing ways that women peace activists operating at the regional level have conceptualized threats to security in the region since decolonization and how this has shaped their advocacy to promote peace. Section three examines the changing geopolitical limits of women's regional collaboration around peacebuilding issues in the same period, and considers how and why the parameters of regional inclusiveness have altered at particular historical junctures. Here specific attention is drawn to the contrasting levels of regional recognition accorded to women from the Pacific's nonindependent states in the years since the 1970s.

I conclude this paper with a call for both policy makers and scholars to make a more consistent effort to accommodate these "bottom-up" varieties of regional political agency into their analyses of Pacific affairs generally. Although, as this article demonstrates, we need to recognize the varying nature of this activity across time and how it may be shaped by shifting influences within the broader political environment, I also contend that efforts to develop a nuanced and deeply contextualized understanding of the content, impact, and scope of this type of informal regional activity can result in the development of innovative and productive approaches to regionalism. These might positively complement the mainstream, top-down approaches to Pacific integration and regional security that currently predominate.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND REGIONAL SECURITY

In recent decades, depictions of the Pacific Islands as an "arc of instability" have become a convenient shorthand for many academic observers and policy makers engaged in political analysis of this region. Instances of violent internal conflict occurring in New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, and Fiji since the 1980s are frequently described in

ways that underscore their immediate local significance while also fueling more generalized concerns that conflict is becoming endemic to the Islands region as a whole.³

Amid such concerns, regional cooperation has come to be seen as an important strategy for conflict prevention (McGhie 2005). The idea that the “problems of one, might be the problems of all” (Urwin 2005, 17) underpins this effort and has been used to convince Pacific leaders that overall regional security will be increased through the establishment of regional mechanisms to deal with conflict outbreaks, as well as through systems of “pooled” regional authority (Fry 2005, 90). It is in this vein that negotiations have begun within the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) to develop a Pacific Plan with the broad aim of encouraging increased economic and political integration between member countries (Urwin 2005, 16–17; Fry 2005, 2004; Powles 2006). While the project is ongoing and argument continues as to the form and future directions regional integration might take, Forum member countries appear motivated to move beyond the cooperative institutional frameworks already in place. They also seem convinced by the idea that Pacific regionalism is a progressive risk management strategy with the capacity to minimize future regional threats to security.

The regional adoption in 2000 of the Biketawa Declaration by member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum (an intergovernmental institution made up of sovereign Pacific countries and Australia and New Zealand) provides a good indication of how regional efforts to manage conflict in the Pacific are manifest. This mechanism was developed in response to the overthrow of governments in Solomon Islands and Fiji in 2000. It guarantees the principle of noninterference in Island states’ domestic affairs but also sets out a list of proposed actions that would be available to the Forum in the event of political crises in particular countries in the region. The actions range from releasing statements about the crises that represent the consensual views of Forum members, to establishing fact-finding missions to consider crisis solutions, to holding special meetings to consider targeted measures should crises persist (Urwin 2005, 16–17). These measures were recently invoked to discipline the postcoup military regime that has been in place in Fiji since 2006, and they ultimately led to the expulsion of that country from the Forum in May 2009 (Chand 2009).

The linking of regionalism with the broader Pacific security agenda has, of course, been subject to more critical appraisal. Some consider the current fixation with conflict in the Pacific as akin to crisis-mongering

(MacLellan 2004, 538), a “doomsday” depiction of Pacific Islands affairs that ignores the historical antecedents to conflict in the region, and particularly the “structural changes caused by colonialism and its aftermath” (Chappell 2005, 290; Fry 1997; 2000; Fraenkel 2004). Others contend that the push to develop enhanced mechanisms of regional governance is “explicitly hegemonic” and led by neighboring powers like Australia, whose own domestic security imperatives are informed by anxieties about failing states in the region (Fry 2005, 101). Additionally, questions have been raised about the supposed representativeness of regional intergovernmental organizations. Ron Crocombe was long critical of what he termed the “Fiji Hijack” of regionalism, contending that the situation has produced an overconcentration of regional institutions in that country (2001, 613). Although this might be justified by the geographical location of Fiji and its historical and contemporary importance as a regional “crossroads” (Teaiwa 2001, 351),⁴ Crocombe alleged that the unfortunate by-product of this situation is a tendency for Fiji’s perspectives to predominate on many regional issues (2001, 613).⁵ Notwithstanding these significant criticisms, however, there also seems to be general agreement among many observers of Pacific Islands affairs that increased regional integration can be of positive benefit to communities in the Pacific, not least for the fact that it may encourage a higher degree of regional interdependence and, by extension, enhance regional stability and security.⁶

The regional activities undertaken by Pacific women and, in particular, their efforts to promote peace through collaborative regional campaigns are frequently overlooked in these discussions (see Chand 2005; Crocombe 2005; Bryant-Tokalau and Frazer 2006). This occurs despite the fact that articulations of Pacific women’s regional solidarity date back to the 1970s and have their roots in much earlier activities, such as regional community development programs for women run since the 1940s by the South Pacific Commission and regional church congresses that have also involved women (George 2009a, 2009b). In the intervening period, this activity has intensified politically and accrued important dividends at both regional and international levels (Goodwillie and Lechte 1985; George 2009c; Griffen 1984). As a result of regional advocacy collaborations, Pacific women have successfully pushed their case for representation in regional intergovernmental institutions such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, which began to hold triennial regional conferences for Pacific women in the 1980s and established its Pacific Women’s Resource Bureau at the same time (George 2009c).⁷ This was later followed by the

Pacific Islands Forum's incorporation of a Gender Issues Advisor Desk in its secretariat in the mid-1990s (Morris 2009). Through the development of informal regional networks, Pacific women activists have also made an impact in international policy-making circles. This was recently demonstrated in March 2009 when, in response to the concerted efforts of a regional coalition of Pacific Islands women, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) gave explicit recognition to the impact of climate change on Pacific Islands communities.⁸ The activists' international impact was again in evidence in early 2010 when the United Nations (UN) announced the formation of its Expert Group on the Role of Women in Peace and Security, which included the membership of Fiji-based peace campaigner and coordinator of the Pacific PeaceWomen Project, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls (UNNC 2010).

The idea that regional solidarity and collaboration contributes to women's advancement is evident when Pacific women face adversity and when they secure political gains. Contributions to regional e-mail lists such as the Pacific Women's Information Network (PACWIN), operated by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, demonstrate that events such as the antigovernment riots that took place in Tonga in November 2006 or the military coup occurring in Fiji in December of the same year elicit sympathetic responses from activist women around the Pacific, who interpret these episodes as posing both a short-term threat to women's security and a longer-term impediment to women's regional campaigns for equality and social justice. Local advancements for Pacific women have also been celebrated in this forum. Electoral successes for women members of Parliament, the appointment of women to positions of authority in state bureaucracies, or Pacific states' ratifications of international instruments designed to advance the status of women, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), have been interpreted by PACWIN contributors as regional milestones for all Pacific women and indicators of their collective achievement.

The following discussion of two case studies demonstrates how Pacific women's collaborative campaigns to promote peace have also accrued important political dividends, both regionally and internationally. The first case study examines Pacific women's regional campaigns to oppose the nuclear presence in the Pacific Islands; the second considers how women's networks have confronted localized instances of conflict in a more contemporary setting. While noteworthy gains have been made by Pacific women in each of these areas of endeavor, such historical comparisons

also demonstrate how shifts in the orientation of women's peacebuilding efforts have emerged over time. This poses important questions about how advocacy communities collectively determine threats to security and collectively mobilize behind shared peacebuilding objectives. Later sections of this paper give further consideration to the idea that these processes are not determined independently of the broader currents that structure political life in the region but are often buoyed by them. While not detracting from the important role Pacific women have played as peacebuilders, this perspective on their activity invites critical assessment of the interplaying political, economic, and strategic factors that, over time, have enabled the success of some peacebuilding advocacy strategies and collaborations while apparently limiting the impact of others.

Case 1: Women Campaigning for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific

From the late 1960s onward, Pacific women played an important role in the development of advocacy campaigns protesting nuclear testing in the region. Foreign powers seeking to cement their global and regional strategic influence had, since the 1950s, used the Pacific Islands region as a laboratory for nuclear weapons detonation. But these programs began to face increasing resistance from Pacific Islanders as communities became aware of the links between nuclear testing and the degradation of ocean and island-based ecosystems, posing serious risks to the health of populations in the vicinity of testing sites and resulting in the forced displacement of some Pacific populations found to be living in unsafe habitats (Teaiwa 1990, 1994; dé Ishtar 1998; Siwatibau and Williams 1981). The anti-nuclear cause became an important focal point for Pacific Islands women peace campaigners.

Women activists were pivotal in promoting community and political awareness of the costs of the Pacific's nuclear presence as well as the broader issue of foreign powers' military activities in the region. They accomplished this through advocacy work in women's church and community groups, the various YWCAs established in the region, student organizations emerging on the newly founded regional university campuses, and collaborative regional advocacy organizations that focused on this issue, such as ATOM (Against Testing on Muroroa). Women's activity on this question was generally targeted against France, which had an ongoing program of weapons testing in French Polynesia, and the United States, which, it was alleged, had a responsibility to address the environmental degradation and health impacts accruing from its testing programs in Micronesia, specifically in

the Marshall Islands (Teaiwa 1990). Peace-oriented campaigns tackling these issues included letter-writing campaigns protesting French nuclear testing in the region and targeting French diplomatic representatives; protest marches, rallies, and theatre presentations; the organization of regional conferences focused on the impacts of colonization and militarization in the region; and the direct political lobbying of political, indigenous, and religious leaders across the Pacific (George 2009c).

This work eventually helped shape Pacific states' policy on this question in significant ways. In the southwest Pacific, leaders of newly independent states such as Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in Fiji and Sir Michael Somare in Papua New Guinea (PNG) promoted a vigorous antinuclear stance, which was evident in the domestic formulation of their foreign policy agendas, the orientation of their regional advocacy on the Pacific nuclear presence, and their activities in the United Nations throughout the 1970s (Ogashiwa 1991; George 2009b).

In Micronesia, women activists worked to promote awareness of the devastating public health and environmental impacts of US nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands and to resist US plans to spread its military presence to other Island territories. Palau became a particularly significant site in this struggle as women peace activists rallied in 1979 to protect Palau's radical nuclear-free constitution, the world's first (Teaiwa 1990; Wilson 1995). Although ultimately unsuccessful, this campaign, waged largely through juridical avenues, proved a significant thorn in the side of the US administration from 1981 to 1993. Despite US hegemonic regional presence in Micronesia and its administrative control in Palau, the campaign spearheaded by Palau's women prevented the US military from gaining "permanent access to Belau's land, reefs and waters" for over a decade—a situation that compromised US strategic regional planning (Wilson 1995, ix). This stand also won a Nobel Peace Prize nomination in 1988 for Otil a Beluad, the principal women's organization in Palau leading the advocacy campaign and judicial actions (Teaiwa 2008, 322; Wilson 1995, 4).

Pacific women's peace activism on the antinuclear cause was internationally productive in other ways as well. As they began to attend conferences on the status of women sponsored by the United Nations beginning in the 1970s, women from the Pacific Islands realized that if their voices were to be heard internationally on this question they needed to work together as a regional delegation and articulate a regional women's agenda. The women involved saw this as a more powerful strategy than addressing an international audience as individual and easily ignored rep-

representatives of small island states (Taufa Vakatale, pers comm, Oct 2002; Siwatibau, pers comm, Oct 2002; Rokotuivuna, pers comm, Nov 2002). Ultimately these efforts paid a dividend. At the UN Mid-Decade Conference on the Status of Women, held in Copenhagen in 1980, a regional coalition of Pacific activist women from Fiji, New Caledonia, Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, and French Polynesia was formed, calling for global action on the Pacific nuclear testing issue. This group effectively lobbied diplomatic representatives from Australia and New Zealand to present to the intergovernmental conference a resolution cosponsored with the official Pacific Islands delegates, calling for a nuclear test ban treaty in the region (Hill 1980). Australian and New Zealand leaders' later willingness to become signatories to a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (SPNFZ) in 1985 is further testimony to the international effectiveness of the antinuclear campaigns undertaken collaboratively by Pacific women on the local and regional stage in the preceding decades (Alexander 1994; Ogashiwa 1991).⁹

Case 2: Women's Peacebuilding in Response to Localized Conflict

Since the 1980s, women activists have confronted numerous localized threats to peace, including intertribal violence in the Papua New Guinea highlands, civil war in Bougainville, repeated coups and outbreaks of inter-ethnic conflict in Fiji, pro-democracy rioting in Tonga, and complex manifestations of violence against metropolitan administrations in New Caledonia, Palau, and Guam. They have responded to these scenarios in differing ways.

Apart from adopting what might be termed a "human security" perspective of peacebuilding and addressing the immediate humanitarian needs of their local communities during periods of violence (Havini 2004, 76; Mirinka 1994, 2004; Raren Miriori 2004), Pacific women have also played an important role in more literal areas of peace promotion. In this respect Pacific women peacebuilders have developed strategies that have helped halt murderous tribal violence and reconcile warring parties in the PNG highlands (Garap 2004); they have also promoted customary peace processes as well as more institutionalized forms of peace negotiation in settings such as Bougainville, Solomon Islands, Fiji, and New Caledonia (Saovana-Spriggs 2003; Pollard 2000; Tovosia Paina 2000; Bhagwan Rolls 2000; Garap 2004).

Debate on the increasingly urgent issue of post-conflict transition in the Pacific has also involved women. Women activists across the region have

developed collaborative pro-democracy campaigns (FWRM 2001), ventures to promote human rights (RRRT 2002), efforts to promote legal literacy and respect for rule of law (FWRM 2001; RRRT 2002), and campaigns aiming to protect the cultural and political sovereignty of Pacific peoples living in the region's foreign-administered territories (Omomo Melen Pacific 1995). This advocacy is often informed by the view that peace is threatened in the Pacific when robust, equitable, and representative structures of governance are absent. While they may hold differing ideas about the ideal shape of institutional structures and the models of governance that best uphold these principles, Pacific women's advocacy on the question of conflict transition frequently makes reference to the idea that prevailing systems of governance in the Pacific Islands have faults that must be overcome if future conflicts are to be avoided (Bhagwan Rolls 2000; FWRM 1996, 2000, 2009).

Increasingly such ventures borrow from international conventions in the area of peacebuilding and, when compared with earlier periods, appear to take a less critical perspective of how global influences shape security challenges in the region. This trend is demonstrated in the activities of the collaborative Pacific PeaceWomen Project, a venture that involves women's organizations from Bougainville, Tonga, Solomon Islands, and Fiji (femLINKPACIFIC 2008a, 2008b). This project aims to promote regional awareness of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which was adopted in 2000 and recognizes both the impact of war on women and "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peace-building" (UNSC 2000). Each of the groups working under the Pacific PeaceWomen banner deems this emphasis on UNSCR 1325 to be important. Through their involvement with various local women's groups, the members of this regional body have dealt with the firsthand impacts of recent conflict in their own countries and have strong ideas about how women might contribute to peace in these settings.

The Pacific PeaceWomen feel, however, that these efforts are largely marginalized when the process of mainstream peace-negotiation is begun in Pacific contexts (femLINKPACIFIC 2008a, 2008b). They therefore aim to promote a higher level of institutional accountability on this question and make repeated references to UNSCR 1325 along with a range of other international instruments as part of their lobbying efforts. Aside from intensive in-country lobbying for their inclusion in formal peace processes, the PeaceWomen have also sought to influence how the conflict management agencies within the Pacific Islands Forum address this question. In

June 2008 they achieved their first success in this regard and were granted permission to participate in a Track II Forum Dialogue on regional security policy. They were also able to address the Forum's Regional Security Committee retreat in the same year (femLINKPACIFIC 2008a).

These examples indicate the substance and impact of some of the regional work undertaken by Pacific women working collaboratively to promote peace. These efforts also provide strong evidence to support Hau'ofa's thesis regarding the oceanic imaginary and articulations of regional solidarity, or, as Teresia Teaiwa has termed it, Pacific Islands "fluidarity" around women's peacebuilding ambitions (quoted in Jolly 2005, 159). Yet if the broader strategic value of this activity is to be fully appreciated, account must also be taken of how this regional collaborative activity shifts and alters over time. In other words, we can speculate about the broader implications of this activity for Pacific regionalism generally, but we must also examine how this type of political advocacy is enabled and constrained by prevailing political circumstances. In the following sections of this paper, therefore, I foreground, first, the varying ways that women peace activists working regionally in the Pacific have conceptualized and responded to threats to peace in the past forty years and, second, how the limits of this regional women's peacebuilding community have been variously defined. In each instance I attempt to situate these changes through a consideration of the broader political factors—global and local—that may have contributed to these shifts.

Aside from its strategic significance, this attempt to situate the changing nature of Pacific women's regional peacebuilding activity also has significance for broader debates occurring within feminist international relations and peace studies that aim to make visible the ways that women experience conflict and contribute to conflict transformation. Notwithstanding the importance of this existing work, my research aims to promote a more nuanced perspective on conventional associations proffered about women's relationship to peacebuilding, which, as Anne Tickner has argued (2001), tend to promote flattened-out conceptualizations of both women and peace.¹⁰ My approach to this debate seeks to demonstrate the varying ways in which visions of peace are promoted by women and the varying manners in which women participate in peacebuilding communities. By examining how these shifts are evident and how their emergence might be explained, I hope to challenge the assumptions that women envisage threats to peace in ways that are singular and that they have homogenous views about what peacebuilding entails.

SHIFTING NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

The two case studies of women's peacebuilding advocacy in this article indicate a pronounced shift in the normative orientation of this activity as it has developed over time. In the era of Pacific decolonization, peace advocacy tended to focus on levels of militarization in the Pacific, nuclear weapons testing, and the continued colonial presence of metropolitan powers on Pacific Island territories—all influences that were understood to threaten peace in the region (Griffen 1984; George 2009a; Danielsson 1980; Wilson 1995). In the 1970s, some Pacific women activists extended their critical gaze even further to contest the economic activities of foreign enterprises in the Pacific whose agricultural, mining, or tourism ventures were often seen to similarly compromise the prospects of regional peace (Rokotuivuna 1973; Slatter 1973, Déwé Gorodé, quoted in Griffen 1975, 107–109). Together, these varieties of peace advocacy focused attention on damaging influences emanating from outside the region and how these threatened the well-being and social cohesion of Pacific communities. They tended to emphasize the idea that peaceful social relations could only be achieved if careful thought was given to the appropriateness of external influences shaping models of political and economic development for the Pacific Islands region and how these might impact on Island communities' economic, political, and, in some cases, cultural sovereignty.

In the contemporary setting, women's regional peace activist networks have tended to promote a more localized perspective on conflict in the Pacific Islands. This trend has seen women activists focus more directly on the local developments and pressures that are felt to fuel violent conflict in the region and the local measures that might be put in place to aid conflict resolution. This said, women activists today are also intent on promoting their own participation in formalized peacebuilding processes. To do this they have embraced international policy mechanisms such as UNSCR 1325 as an important lobbying tool that legitimates their efforts to increase the role of women in localized conflict resolution measures. Such developments are indicative of shifting understandings of how the global and local intersect when it comes to conflict prevention and conflict management in the region. Importantly, they seem to suggest a less critical perspective on the international realm than was evident in Pacific women's peace advocacy circles in earlier decades.

This altered understanding of where threats to Pacific Islands security lie can of course be explained, in part, by the fact that advocates today are

responding to conflicts that appear to have arisen as a result of localized tensions that were perhaps less apparent in the era of Pacific decolonization. Incidents such as the violent antigovernment riots in Tonga in 2006, murderous ethnic violence and lawlessness in Solomon Islands, protracted and deadly conflict over a ten-year period in Bougainville, and the ongoing history of coups in Fiji have together stretched the resources of women's groups who are trying to secure a more peaceful Pacific region. Thus it is understandable that women's role in peacebuilding has tended to be framed in ways that emphasize women's direct participation in formal peace negotiations and respect for international instruments that promote their inclusion in conflict resolution processes.

Nonetheless it can also be argued that some of the international challenges that Pacific women peace advocates addressed in their advocacy in earlier decades retain their salience today. For example, the prolonged crisis and continued tensions in Bougainville point to the way that the activities of external economic and military interests can trigger complex and wide-ranging conflict scenarios with the capacity to wreak serious devastation on local communities (Wesley-Smith and Ogan 1992; Denoon 2000).¹¹ Yet, although the region's women peace activists remain attentive to developments on Bougainville and conscious of the fragile state of peace in this setting, particularly as discussions about reopening the troubled Panguna mine continue (Connell 2005, 2007), they have not scrutinized the international dimensions of this conflict in ways that they might have in previous decades (femLINKPACIFIC 2008b).

Likewise, levels of militarization in the Pacific do not receive the same type of attention they seemed to merit previously, despite the fact that military buildup is proceeding at an alarming level in some contexts, and with serious consequences for local populations. The military presence in Fiji is, of course, formidable in political terms with the country's military leaders directly or indirectly implicated in the overthrow of elected governments in 1987, 2000, and again in 2006 (Halapua 2003; Fraenkel 2008; Lal 2002). While women from across the region have lamented the ongoing political instability in Fiji and the social implications of efforts to legitimize this hypermasculine exercise of political power,¹² few have given sustained consideration to the international influences that have contributed to the supremacy of the Fiji Military Forces (FMF) over the years. The Fiji Military Forces may have gained international prestige as a result of their major contributions to UN-mandated peacekeeping operations, which have spanned a thirty-year period, yet the disturbing by-product

of this scenario has been a tenfold increase in domestic military spending (Halapua 2003). It is no accident then that FMF attempts to define a national political role for itself, generally by forceful means, have coincided with its expanded international peacekeeping role (Halapua 2003, 51–53). While some local women's organizations have been active on the question of Fiji troop deployments in recent years and have called for the repatriation of Fijian personnel stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan (WAC 2007a, 2007b), they have been quiet on the local political implications of continued participation in the UN's militarized peacekeeping operations.

The issue of rising levels of militarism is also pertinent for the nonindependent territories of the Pacific governed by metropolitan powers and seeking to rebuild their strategic interest in the region. This is particularly the case in Guam, where since 1945 the United States has maintained such a strong military presence that the US-governed territory is commonly described as "Fortress Guam" or the "tip of America's Spear" (Alexander 2008, 93). The US presence has recently become a more hotly debated topic locally as the United States has attempted to win support for a proposed relocation to Guam of some of its troubled Okinawa military bases in Japan, a deployment that would see Guam's population increase by over 40,000 in the next six years (Marsh 2009). While some local residents have publicly embraced these plans and see them as a logical further extension of the already substantial US strategic presence on the island (Murphy 2008), others are less enthusiastic. In particular, Guam's indigenous Chamorro community has expressed concerns locally and internationally about the negative implications of rising militarism, which it claims poses threats to indigenous cultural integrity and landownership, the health of local populations, and their economic well-being (Alexander 2008; Marsh 2009).

However, such concerns have not been broadly considered throughout the region, and developments on Guam have met with a generally benign response from the region's women peace activists.¹³ The lack of debate among Pacific women on this question is a somewhat ironic scenario if we consider the strong levels of resistance that women from across Asia have shown toward US military bases located in Pacific Rim countries such as South Korea, the Philippines, and, most significantly, Okinawa itself. Okinawan women have made strenuous efforts to expose the gendered impacts of foreign militarism on their soil, documenting the high levels of violence perpetrated against local women—physical and sexual—by US military personnel stationed on the island, and the impact of rising

numbers of migrant sex workers who have made their way to Okinawa to fill the military's demand for transactional sex. Such concerns indicate that the proposed relocation project on Guam could have significant and detrimental consequences for Pacific women generally, not just on Guam, in the years to come.¹⁴ Yet the threats the proposed base transfer poses—both to the security of the Pacific's women and more generally to the well-being of Pacific populations as the region becomes once again a site of strategic play for the world's great powers—seems largely to have escaped the attention of Pacific women committed to promoting peace.

In broad terms, these examples suggest that an important conceptual shift has occurred among the region's peace advocates with regard to how threats to regional peace are identified and understood. Despite strong evidence indicating that global influences are at work in the region with the potential to undermine the security of Pacific women and Pacific communities in general (Teaiwa 2008), women's regional peacebuilding collaborations have recently tended not to emphasize this fact. Instead their repeated references to international instruments such as UNSCR 1325 suggest that they see the international realm as one that enables rather than compromises peace in the region. This practice stands in stark contrast to the more "internationalized" forms of peace advocacy as undertaken by the region's women activists in the era of Pacific decolonization.

Locating and identifying these contrasts in women's peace advocacy is important from a theoretical perspective because they demonstrate how varying conceptual approaches to security inform women's peace advocacy. As noted earlier, awareness of how this terrain may alter over time provides an important counter narrative to the more conventional but oversimplified idea that women's responses to conflict are singular and that the objectives of their peace advocacy are defined in uniform terms. Such shifts also tend to complicate the claim that women's capacity to identify threats to security and promote peace is necessarily enhanced by a feminine capacity, innate or learned, for "nurturing" or motherhood (Ruddick 1987). Rather, the examples discussed here indicate the need for a critical assessment of the normative orientation of women's peace advocacy, of how this orientation might be subject to change, and of the broader factors, global and local, that might explain these changes. Therefore, to gain a clear and strategic understanding of what women peace activists have achieved and can achieve in the region we must also think about how these changed directions in women's peace advocacy might be shaped by the broader prevailing influences—economic, strate-

gic, sociocultural—shaping the regional trajectory of Pacific Island politics generally.

For example, women peacebuilders' seeming disinclination to critically examine the impact and legitimacy of international influences in the Pacific may reflect the view, broadly held in the region, that international engagement in the Pacific promotes economic opportunity. Given this perspective, proposals to reopen mining operations on Bougainville may be subject to less critical scrutiny by the region's women peace activists today than in earlier historical periods because these proposals coincide with the more general marketized approach to development and global integration that tends to structure external aid agencies' programming in the region. As recent policy statements from Australian government representatives demonstrate, this is a formulation that tends to promote the economic benefits of global economic integration as a foundation for Pacific security (Anderson 2009; Crean 2009). In practice, it may work to discourage local scrutiny of Pacific Islands resource extraction industries, such as those newly proposed for Bougainville, and their potentially destabilizing impacts.

The economic impacts of militarization in Fiji may have a similarly constraining impact on regional peace advocacy. As noted previously, the participation of the Fiji Military Forces in UN peacekeeping operations has been a significant foreign revenue earner for the country—a particularly important consideration given the detrimental impact successive coups have had for other, now troubled, sectors that have earned foreign income for Fiji, such as tourism and, more recently, garment manufacturing (Chand 2007).¹⁵ While women peace activists in the region may feel inclined to critically examine the consequences of this scenario, they also seem to be cautious about politically sabotaging what has become an important public revenue stream for Fiji's struggling economy, even when this income comes with significant national political risks attached.¹⁶

Likewise, across the Pacific, there has been a degree of positive interest shown in the proposed US base relocation project on Guam. Regional institutions such as the Pacific Islands Forum and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community are said to be eagerly anticipating the formulation of a framework of mutual understanding between the US military and Pacific countries outside Guam that would enable workers from the region to gain employment in the proposed three billion dollars' worth of public projects deemed necessary to establish the new bases (Marsh 2009; Baselala 2009). Others contend that the relocation scheme will provide

unprecedented economic opportunities for Pacific Islands businesses as demand for small-scale projects gets underway (*Islands Business* 2009). They also argue that the relocation can contribute to the general “upskilling” of the Pacific labor force, as the project necessitates the importation of qualified tradespeople as well as people to provide support services to military families, such as medical and paramedical workers and teachers.¹⁷ The overwhelmingly positive coverage of these developments has tended to stifle broader regional consideration of how the US military buildup on Guam may generate negative consequences for the Pacific region and seems to have discouraged Pacific women peace activists from engaging in any critique of this project from a perspective that might foreground gender concerns (see Viernes 2009, 108–109).

Certainly women peace activists who were active in the 1960s and 1970s appear to have been more attentive to the destabilizing impacts of the international presence in the region in comparison to their later counterparts. Yet it is also important to consider the earlier political context in which they were operating and how this encouraged a more critical perspective on international political developments in the Pacific. Pacific decolonization saw some of the region’s political leaders become actively engaged in a politics of resistance against the militarized activities of the region’s metropolitan powers, voicing strong opposition to continued colonial rule by the French administrators in Melanesian territories as well as to the French and US nuclear testing programs that were underway across the region (Ogashiwa 1991). This internationally resistant political posture opened a pathway that women peace advocates could further exploit. Hence their calls for the Pacific region to declare itself nuclear free and politically independent were afforded a level of normative legitimacy, thanks to the fact that they coincided with the political demands being made by Pacific statesmen themselves on the international stage. As I have shown, political leaders across the region today offer a far less critical appraisal of international influences and their capacity to threaten regional peace and security; peace advocates appear to have followed suit, averting their critical gaze from the international and localizing the focus of their own approaches to peacebuilding in the region.

SHIFTING ARTICULATIONS OF REGIONAL VOICE

In part, the seeming inattention paid to military developments on Guam by Pacific women peacebuilders may also be explained by a broader shift

or disconnect that seems to have occurred between Pacific women activists from the region's sovereign and non-sovereign territories. This becomes most particularly evident when consideration is given to the history of regional connections that have been forged between women from the anglophone and francophone Pacific around issues related to peacebuilding. These observations may also have relevance for the way relationships between women peace advocates from the region's independent and non-independent territories are negotiated more generally.

In July 2007 I attended the SPC 10th triennial conference of Pacific women, which was held at the SPC headquarters in Noumea. At the closing ceremony for this event, held on the grounds of the imposing Tjibaou Cultural Centre, I observed New Caledonia's deputy president, Déwé Gorodé, implore sister-delegates to the conference to learn more about the experiences of women in her country and what they might mean for the region overall. She described a remarkable ceremony of reconciliation that had taken place in 2004 between the widow of Kanak independence leader Jean Marie Tjibaou and the widow of his assassin, and the national significance of this act in terms of helping to heal a rift that had marred relations between communities in different parts of New Caledonia since 1989. This ceremony was the subject of a documentary film, *Tjibaou Le Pardon* (Dagneau 2006), which has been shown internationally, is widely acclaimed, and has won several awards, including the Prix Spécial du Jury at the Festival Internationale du Filme documentaire Océania (FIFO) 2007. Yet Gorodé argued that there was a general regional ignorance of this event and a lack of appreciation for how it might be more broadly relevant to the work of regional networks of women peacebuilders.

Similar concerns regarding the regional ignorance of issues pertinent to the Pacific's francophone women were raised at other points during the conference. On repeated occasions women from French Polynesia and from Wallace and Futuna complained that there was little regional awareness of their work aiming to promote gender equality. These same women also often lamented the fact that they were "starved" for information on developments taking place for women in other parts of the Pacific.

It might, of course, be assumed that such concerns can be easily explained by the obvious linguistic divide that exists between the francophone and anglophone Pacific, a barrier that potentially hampers communication between women and provides an obvious explanation for this state of affairs. Yet a look back through the history of women's regional peacebuilding suggests that in the 1960s and 1970s there were far stron-

ger relationships forged between women activists from the French and English regions of the Pacific than seem evident today. Earlier peacebuilding efforts that emphasized indigenous rights to self-government, opposition to continuing colonial presence in the region, and the eradication of nuclear weapons in the Pacific appear to have provided far more fertile ground for collaboration between anglophone and francophone women activists. The political climate of that period also provided the opportunity for Kanak women such as Déwé Gorodé and Susanna Ounei to emerge as influential representatives of the francophone Pacific territories, and indeed the Pacific region more generally, on the international stage (Riles 2001; Omomo Melen Pacific 1995; dé Ishtar 1994; Griffen 1975). This would seem to indicate that the apparent regional disconnect on peace issues was less in evidence in earlier decades.

At one point in the 2007 conference proceedings, I questioned delegates from Vanuatu on this issue and was struck by the dismissive nature of their responses. Despite the geographical proximity of New Caledonia and Vanuatu and the shared history of French colonial influence (which, I imagined, might provide fruitful possibilities for collaboration on gender issues), it was claimed that the ties between women in the different settings were not strong. Some efforts had been made—for example, groups visiting each other from time to time; but overall the spirit of collaboration rarely lasted, even where there was a common focus on key issue areas such as violence against women. Commenting on this situation, one Vanuatu representative speculated, “We feel that maybe they resent us because we have independence and they don’t.”

The issue of Pacific Island territories’ political status is significant and can be seen to disadvantage francophone women, along with women from the region’s other non-sovereign territories, in specific ways. These states do not have direct representation in the United Nations. This means that women living within these political systems are unable to work directly with UN agencies such as UNDP Pacific or UNIFEM Pacific, bodies that over the last ten years have provided important support for Pacific women’s advocacy organizations and cross-regional networking opportunities through their regional programs designed to promote women’s advancement. Without access to these agencies, women’s organizations in the region’s non-sovereign territories are restricted in the extent to which they can learn from other activist women around the region or share information on the particular challenges they face.

Yet the observations made by the women from Vanuatu may also point

to other ways in which the question of colonial influence can become contentious for women from non-sovereign Pacific territories when they attempt to form broader regional connections. From some of my observations of interactions and conversation taking place at the Noumea women's conference in 2007 it seemed that the ongoing, and very evident, material dimensions of French influence tended to be viewed as compromising the authenticity of francophone women's attempts to articulate a regional voice.

For example, one only has to spend a small amount of time in Noumea's tourist strip around Anse Vata, where the SPC center is also located, to come to terms very quickly with what might be called the material aspect of the French presence in New Caledonia. Indeed, much of Noumea feels more like a French provincial town than elsewhere in the Pacific, with its French cars, cafés, restaurants, supermarkets, boutiques, boulangeries (bakeries), and increasingly large ex-metropolitan French population. The economic dimensions of this presence are rapidly apparent too, as the visitor is abruptly confronted with the high cost of living, which is more comparable to European standards than that of neighboring Pacific countries and is explained by New Caledonia's heavy reliance on French imported goods.

Traveling on buses around Noumea with conference delegates from other parts of the Pacific, I was part of discussions that frequently focused on the level of infrastructure that differentiated Noumea from many other Pacific cities. The brightness and quantity of street lighting, the signage, and the condition of the roads, pavements, and gardens were all remarked on and viewed as signifiers of a level of wealth and a generalized standard of living that contrasted powerfully with the way these things were manifest back home. This led to an intense speculation over how much money the French were pouring into this territory to sustain such a bright, shiny metropolis.

Of course it should not be assumed that all the citizens of New Caledonia, or even the residents of Noumea, have access to this level of wealth. Nonetheless there was a strong sense among the women I spoke to that one might, in this place, attain a standard of living that would not be achievable in other parts of the Pacific. This led me to wonder if the regional standing of women from the French Pacific is perhaps compromised by a widely held perception that Pacific Islanders living under French systems of administration have access to a range of opportunities that are denied to women in other parts of the region.

Despite the broad diversity of Pacific communities and cultures, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that some effort to define a commonality of regional experience underpins Pacific women's approaches to regionalism. But how do women from the francophone Pacific territories, or indeed other non-sovereign Pacific states, make their points of view heard in these types of discussions, particularly if, as my observations in New Caledonia suggest, there is a general perception that their experiences of political or economic marginalization may be out of step with those of other Pacific women? In earlier periods, when the French presence in New Caledonia and French Polynesia was more violently contested and perhaps not so well resourced monetarily as it is since the Matignon Accords, such questions seem not to have carried the same weight. In these years, figures such as Gorodé and Ounei voiced a defiant political agenda that identified the destructive and gendered impacts of colonial rule in the region (Griffen 1975; Ounei 1985). Their activism struck a chord with women in other Pacific Island contexts who were similarly challenging international forces that they felt were undermining Pacific Islands states' sovereignty and stability, even where formal political independence had been negotiated. It therefore seems ironic that as successive French administrations have sought to create a more stable environment in their territories while also giving greater recognition to the political, economic, and cultural aspirations of indigenous communities, there appears to be a devaluing of francophone women's experience as lacking in regional authenticity. If the gulf can be explained in this way, it is perpetuated in ignorance both of the heavy costs colonization has exacted on the francophone populations of the Pacific in the past, and of the regional solidarity that developed among women as these things were challenged in the 1960s and 1970s.

This scenario has similar ramifications for women from other Pacific non-sovereign territories. During the SPC women's conference, I also observed women from the Pacific territories of Guam, Palau, and the Northern Marianas (administered by the United States) and Niue (administered by New Zealand) argue strongly for a more inclusive regional response to information sharing and for more opportunities to be created that might allow them to participate and contribute to regional discussions on the status of women. This suggests that the same barriers to regional participation may exist for women from other non-independent states in the Pacific in the contemporary setting, barriers that were not so discernable in earlier periods.

This is certainly evident if we consider the regional status of the Pacific's

“Microwomen” (Teaiwa 1990).¹⁸ While women from US-administered Micronesian territories such as Guam and Palau were regular and valued participants at the regional women’s conferences convened by nongovernmental organizations in 1975 and 1987, their participation in Pacific Islands regional forums has become far more difficult to detect in later periods (Griffen 1975, 1987). Indeed, a recent conference on women’s responses to militarism held in Guam in September 2009 suggests that Micronesian women have a profound interest in regionalism but find it easier to forge links with other women’s organizations from the Asian nations of the north Pacific such as South Korea, the Philippines, and Japan, who are also negotiating the impact of US militarization.¹⁹

This situation suggests that within regional peacebuilding communities such as those developed among Pacific women, tensions surrounding questions of regional authenticity may arise when activists emphasize differing political concerns and objectives as part of their efforts to resolve conflict. This requires us to consider not only how the boundaries of regional community are collectively determined and understood by Pacific women activists, but also how these processes can be compromised by the broader geopolitical influences at work in the region.

More particularly, however, these considerations also provide important insights into the limitations of women’s regional approaches to peacebuilding. As shown in this article, women peacebuilders collaborating across the Pacific have secured some impressive gains at local, regional, and international levels. Their contributions to Pacific Islands regionalism have not been marginal to the mainstream, despite the fact that their presence is generally overlooked in more conventionally structured accounts of Pacific Islands regional history. Celebration of these achievements is therefore warranted and important. Yet, we should not let it blind us to the limits of this advocacy, both in terms of its shifting normative orientation and its participatory structure. Only by understanding and appreciating these limitations can we develop a truly nuanced picture of the regional political agency Pacific women have demonstrated in the pursuit of peace.

CONCLUSION

Governments neighboring the Pacific region, most particularly Australia and New Zealand, have shown a strategic interest in promoting regional integration in the Pacific as a means by which to minimize the potential for conflict and promote cross-regional stability (Fry 1997, 2005). These

efforts have relied principally on the strengthening of institutional mechanisms of intergovernmental cooperation. Yet in many cases, these institutions are viewed from the local perspective as “imposed” solutions that lack a local legitimacy or local ownership (Fry and Kabutaulaka 2008).

Greater effort to understand how informal regional networks function across the Pacific Islands may help remedy this situation. Such considerations are particularly pertinent to the history of women’s regional peacebuilding advocacy discussed here. By examining how Pacific women have collaborated regionally to promote peace across the previous forty years, I have demonstrated the political significance of informal sites of regional cooperation as they exist in the Pacific Islands and the contributions that they too might make toward strengthening regional integration and, by extension, regional security.

As I have shown, there are important limitations that must be understood when examining the political agency of such sites of regional collaboration. Nonetheless, the gains made by these networks deserve greater attention than they currently receive. The history of women’s regional collaboration around peacebuilding in the Pacific indicates that their responses to conflict have not simply been pushed to the margins but have at various points been engaged with and factored into mainstream policy-making. This evidence suggests that these varieties of regional integration have the capacity to positively complement existing models of regionalism that, perhaps too heavily, emphasize regional cooperation achieved through formalized “top-down” political and economic processes. The history of women’s regional peacebuilding collaboration is surely an indication of how these networks can contribute to the achievement of progressive political and social goals in the Pacific. However, because this potential is at present only partially recognized, it is also only partially realized. The challenge lies in developing regional institutional frameworks that might more easily accommodate the input of informal regional advocacy networks, albeit in ways that allow for the internal shifts and contestation that are also inescapable aspects of this terrain.

Notes

1 The South Pacific Commission was formed in 1947 as a regional organization by the six countries that administered countries in the Pacific Islands: Australia, France, Great Britain, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and the United States.

As decolonization gathered pace in the 1960s and 1970s, membership of this organization expanded to incorporate newly independent Island states. In 1983 membership was expanded to include all twenty-two Pacific Island independent states and foreign-governed territories and to allow all these entities full voting rights in the regional institution. In 1997, on the fiftieth anniversary of the SPC, the organization changed its name to the Secretariat of the Pacific Community to reflect its region-wide membership (SPC 2010).

2 As an anonymous reviewer of this article has pointed out, efforts to uncover informal sites of regional networking might also include consideration of how regional artistic communities or regional youth networks operate and engage unavoidably with the politics of the Pacific Islands. My preliminary research conducted in Fiji and New Caledonia suggests that references to peace and conflict permeate sites of contemporary cultural production in powerful ways. As I conduct further research into the history of women's peacebuilding in the region, I therefore plan to examine in particular how women artists, poets, writers, and performance artists have come together to form creative networks, and to explore the varying responses to conflict and visions of peace that may also permeate this creative work.

3 See interview with Dr Brendan Nelson (Dobell 2006); see also Reilly 2000, 261; 2004; Henderson 2005; Borgu 2002; Beazley 2003; Rudd 2007; Helen Clarke, quoted in Lilley 2004.

4 The traditional importance of Fiji as a transnational site in the Pacific has been noted by Teresia Teaiwa, who pointed out that in Polynesian languages the term "viti," from which Fiji is derived (also reflected in the naming of Fiji's main island Viti Levu), refers to "a site of crossing" (Teaiwa 2001, 351).

5 However, with Fiji currently expelled from the Pacific Islands Forum, the possibilities for Fijian regional dominance are significantly diminished.

6 While Ron Crocombe was highly skeptical about the extent to which regional integration advantages Pacific Islanders, he did see benefit in developing regional solutions to conflict in the Pacific, albeit through an institutional framework that is defined by and geared to meet the interests of Pacific Islanders and located outside the regional hub of Fiji (Crocombe 2001, 153).

7 This bureau was later disbanded in 2007 and fully incorporated into the SPC Human Development Programme, which aims to mainstream gender across all its activities (see SPC 2008).

8 From a posting by Ofa Guttonbeil-Likiliki to the PACWIN e-mail list, with the subject line "Reflections from CSW53: Weaving the Pacific into CSW53," 4 March 2009.

9 However, as Michael Hamel-Green noted (1990, 56, 55–71), the Australian government's decision to take a lead role in the negotiation of this treaty was also motivated by its desire to channel "domestic and regional anti-nuclear sentiment against . . . French nuclear testing" in an effort to divert attention away from the

US nuclear presence in the region and preserve the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, and United States) military alliance.

10 Judy El-Bushra's critical account of the stereotypes surrounding international policy makers' responses to the issue of women in peacebuilding demonstrates the ease with which women's strategic interests become sidelined when they are typecast in conflict scenarios as passive "victims and/or politically neutral carers" (2007, 139).

11 Here I refer to the activities of the mining company Conzinc Riotinto Australia, which was the original proprietor of the troubled Panguna mine (Denoon 2000); the Australian military support offered to PNG forces to quell the Bougainville unrest; and the later involvement of international mercenary forces in Bougainville during the Sandline Affair (Regan 1998; Crocombe 2001, 571-575).

12 Interview with Shamima Ali from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, on *Pacific Beat*, Radio Australia, 24 February 2009; see also Emberson-Bain 1992; Slatter 1994; Ram 1994.

13 Teresia Teaiwa's work on militarization in the Pacific stands out as an important exception to this rule. She has recently outlined the detrimental impact of globalized programs of military buildup in the region's independent and non-independent territories (Teaiwa 2008).

14 The rape of a twelve-year-old Okinawan girl by three US marines in 1995 captured international headlines and increased pressure on both US and Japanese authorities to better police and regulate the military presence in Japan (Isako Angst 2001). But work by women's groups such as Okinawa Women Act against Military Violence has provided strong evidence to suggest that US military personnel have perpetrated acts of sexual and physical violence against local women since the very beginnings of their occupation of Okinawa at the end of the Second World War, and that this violence has continued until the present day (Alexander 2008, 96; Ty Kāwika Tengan, quoted in Keyso 2000, 121).

15 In 2007 Satish Chand estimated that since 1987 each of Fiji's coups has pushed the country's economic development back by three years in real terms (Chand 2007).

16 However, this disinclination toward criticism of Fiji's military may also reflect the difficulty women face in speaking out against an institution that has become an increasingly important employer of young, predominantly indigenous men in Fiji since independence. Recruitment to Fiji's military is seen to provide opportunities in the shape of travel, education, training, and earning capacity for a segment of the country's population whose prospects might otherwise be limited. Voicing criticisms of the military may therefore also result in an unwelcome situation wherein Fiji-based women activists are also seen to be indirectly criticizing choices made by their own family members or relatives. (I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this article who brought this point to my attention.)

17 To this end, Pacific commentators have urged regional training institutions

such as the Fiji Institute of Technology and the University of the South Pacific to design and enhance their programs so that this demand can be met locally from among Pacific Islands populations (*Islands Business* 2009).

18 “Microwomen” was a term coined by Teresia Teaiwa in her 1990 conference paper delivered to the Pacific History Association on the history of Micronesian women’s activism against US militarization (Teaiwa 1990).

19 See web references to the 7th International Meeting of the Network of Women Against Militarism, which took place on Guam on 14–19 September 2009 and brought together participants from Belau, Chuuk, Guåhan, Hawai‘i, Japan, Okinawa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, the Philippines, South Korea, and the continental United States, as well as outside participants from Puerto Rico and Australia (<http://famoksaiyan.blogspot.com/search/label/Famalao%27an> [accessed 25 March 2010])

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Abstract

Contemporary analysis of Pacific Islands regionalism is commonly focused on the institutional realm and examines how frameworks of regional governance have evolved and been strengthened. This article, by contrast, provides insight into the

less well understood political content of more informal modes of Pacific Islands regional integration. In particular, it examines Pacific women's regional peacebuilding collaborations since the 1960s and 1970s. It demonstrates the political impact of Pacific women's collective responses to conflict in the region during the past forty years while also discussing the varying nature of this activity over time. Consideration is therefore given both to Pacific women's differing conceptual approaches to peacebuilding and to the differing geopolitical scope of their regional peacebuilding networks. The significance of this discussion is two-fold. First, this research provides insight into the history of "bottom-up" forms of regional engagement in the Pacific, a realm of political activity that might, if more broadly recognized, positively complement existing programs that aim to secure future security in the Pacific through regional institutional consolidation. Second, it challenges conventional perspectives on women and peacebuilding that tend to suggest that women respond to conflict in ways that are singular, homogenous, and marginal to the political mainstream.

KEYWORDS: Pacific regionalism, women, peacebuilding, Pacific security, advocacy